

And they made His grave with the wicked – but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.

Text: Isaiah 53:9 A 3/26/17 Passion History, part 4 Psalm Responsive Psalm:
Hymns: 42, 149, 744, 175 (1st tune)

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

Jesus, I will ponder now On Thy holy Passion;
With Thy Spirit me endow For such meditation.
Grant that I in love and faith May the image cherish
Of Thy suffering, pain, and death, That I may not perish. (TLH #140:1)

It's typical at this time of year to see magazine articles and television specials claiming to shed light on the death of Jesus Christ, but in reality leaving people in the dark. This morning we turn to the Word of God for the truth about Jesus' death.

Our sermon texts during this Lenten season have been from the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. Isaiah begins today's text: "*They made His grave with the wicked.*" The Jewish leaders believed that Jesus was an evil blasphemer for saying He is the Son of God, and deserved to die for it. The Roman governor Pontius Pilate gave his permission for Jesus to be crucified, which was how the Roman Empire executed the worst criminals. Certainly the Jewish leaders thought that death by crucifixion was a very fitting punishment for Jesus.

Jesus' enemies thought He deserved to die for His sins. But Isaiah has told us, "*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*" (v. 6). Paul tells us in the fourth chapter of Romans that "*Jesus ... was delivered up because of our offenses*" (vv. 24-25). Jesus didn't die because of His own sins. Isaiah says about Jesus, "*There [wasn't] any deceit in His mouth.*" Jesus doesn't have any sins. Jesus died because of His enemies' sins and our sins and the sins of our whole human race. Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, took all the sins of the world upon Himself and paid for them with His death on the cross. Again, we heard from Isaiah that "*He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed*" (v. 5). Jesus wasn't crucified because He was a criminal. Jesus died on the cross to take away our sins.

The Jewish leaders had Jesus put to death as a criminal. The Bible tells us that when Jesus was crucified "*two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left*" (Mt. 27:38). In the minds of the Jewish leaders, Jesus being crucified along with two criminals had to have seemed very fitting.

But Jesus didn't die with criminals because He was a criminal. Jesus had said, "*The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*" (Lk. 19:10). "*[I came] to call ... sinners to repentance*" (Lk. 5:32). By allowing Himself to be crucified along with the two criminals, Jesus

gave them one last chance to believe in Him and be saved before they died. The Bible says that *“those who were crucified with [Jesus] reviled Him”* (Mk. 15:32). At first, both thieves made fun of Jesus for saying He is the Son of God. But in time one of the thieves had a change of heart. He knew he was about to die and face God. Jesus was very well known among the people because of His miracles and His mercy toward sinners. The thief had heard Jesus pray for those who hated Him and had Him crucified, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”* (Lk. 23:34). The thief said to the other thief, *“We receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong”* (Lk. 23:41). *“Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom’”* (Lk. 23:42). The thief was sorry for the things he had done wrong, and he asked Jesus to forgive him. Jesus told him, *“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise”* (Lk. 23:43). Jesus assured the repentant thief that he was forgiven and saved, and would soon be with Jesus in heaven.

Jesus’ promise to the thief repentant thief, *“Today you will be with Me in Paradise,”* shows that Jesus knew that after He Himself died He would rise from the dead. Jesus’ resurrection and our resurrection were prophesied in the Old Testament. Job said, *“I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God”* (19:25-26). It is because Jesus came back to life again after He died that He will *“stand at last on the earth”* on Judgment Day. By faith in Jesus we can say with Job, *“After my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God.”* Jesus says, *“Because I live, you will live also”* (Jn. 14:19). Because Jesus died and rose again bodily from the grave, after we die He will raise us back to life again bodily. He’ll make us perfect, and take us to be with Him in heaven.

We read in the second chapter of Hebrews, *“Through death [Jesus] [destroyed] him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and [released] those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”* (vv. 14-15). We don’t have to be afraid of death and the grave. Jesus, who experienced death and the grave, will be with us. Jesus’ victory over death and the grave assures our victory over death and the grave. Scripture says, *“O Death, where is your sting? O Grave, where is your victory? ... Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Cor. 15:55, 57). We don’t have to be afraid of the devil and hell. Jesus, who defeated the devil and hell, will be with us when we die and give us the final victory over them. Jesus says, *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand”* (Jn. 11:27-28).

Jesus assured the dying thief, *“Today you will be with Me in Paradise.”* Many times in His Word God refers to death for His believing people as *“sleep”* (Mt. 27:52; Jn. 11:11-14, 39-44; etc.). Because of Jesus we don’t have to fear death any more than we fear falling asleep. Like the thief on the cross, we close our eyes in death and the next thing we know we open our eyes and see Jesus in heaven. Jesus says, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die”* (Jn. 11:25-26). By faith in Jesus, death is simply the passageway from life here on earth to eternal life in heaven: *“...shall never die.”* We say with Paul, *“If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s”* (Ro. 14:8). Jesus is with us in life and in death, and He will take us to live with Him forever in heaven.

Isaiah prophesied about Jesus, *“They made His grave with the wicked – but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.”* As we heard, the Jewish leaders put Jesus to death as a criminal, and would have expected that He would be buried with the other criminals who were crucified with Him. God allowed His Son to be put to death on the cross for our salvation. But He did not allow His Son’s body to be placed in some forgotten grave. The Bible tells us, *“Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus”* (Jn. 19:38-42; Mt. 27:57-60). Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy man who had been a secret follower of Jesus, went to Pilate and received his permission to bury Jesus. Joseph placed Jesus’ body in the tomb he had had prepared for himself. Nicodemus, a Pharisee who had also been a secret follower of Jesus, helped Joseph prepare Jesus’ body for burial. Both men had been afraid to let it be known that they believed in Jesus. But Jesus had strengthened their faith. In faith and love they gave the Son of God the honorable burial He deserved. Jesus gave His life on the cross and was laid in an honorable grave as the Son of God and our Savior from sin.

Jesus Christ wasn’t an evil blasphemer who deserved to be put to death. Jesus is the sinless Son of God who willingly gave His life to save us. Jesus wasn’t a criminal who deserved to be crucified with other criminals. Jesus allowed Himself to be crucified with criminals so He could save one of them. Jesus wasn’t a criminal who was buried together with other criminals. Jesus was given the honorable burial He deserved as God’s Son and our Savior. Jesus didn’t remain in the grave. He rose again bodily, defeating death, the grave, the devil, and hell for us! Jesus will raise us bodily from the grave and give us eternal life with Him in heaven! All praise to Jesus, our crucified, risen, living God and Savior! Amen.